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### Oral History Interview: Bill Fox

Bill Fox

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DATE

11/09/84

Bill Fox  
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(Address)

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DATE

11/09/84

John H. Hunsicker  
(Signature - Witness)

BILL FOX  
11/17/84  
WVWV-15



VIETNAM VETERANS

AN INTERVIEW WITH: Bill Fox

CONDUCTED BY: John Hennen, Jr.

November 17, 1984

Transcribed by: Jennifer Smith &

Katherine L. Johnson

71 pages

OHAF Catalog # WVVV-15

tape 25 a & b

JH: This is a check, check. This is John Hennen, Saturday, November 17. I am in the office of Bill Fox of Bailey and Thompson in the West Virginia Building. This is a Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project. Okay Bill, you can just start out with a little background information on, like where you were raised, a little bit about your family, your school \_\_\_\_\_ [clicking noise]

BF: Born here in, in Huntington in, ah, June of 1948 and raised here all my life. I went to local schools. Johnson Elementary and West Junior and Huntington High. And, ah,

JH: Graduated?

BF: Sixty-six [66]. Ah, from Huntington High and then, I was thinking about, ah, about the other interview and in fact after I saw the film yesterday about, ah, some of the people in the film were talking about, ah, their feelings about the war and stuff before they went. [clicking noise]

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And I can not reflect, recollect having any feelings one way or another about Vietnam or communism or anything in my, you know, in my, then I graduated in '66 and, and, ah, we were over there beginning in the late '50s with Eisenhower and then with Kennedy. Of course Johnson, ah, Johnson was the President in just about all my three high school years. Ah, Kennedy was assassinated in November and I started high school, what, two months before that.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And, ah, so that's a lot of build-up, you know, that was occurring '63, '64, '65, '66. But I don't, you know, I don't recollect have any discussions with friends or things like that about what was going on there or whether not we thought it was the right, I guess in those years, '63, '64, and '65 it was more pre-build up time.

JH: Ah hun.

BF: And, ah, not much going on as far in the news and things like that, not as much certainly as, as the late '60s when it was on the news all the time. But, ah,

JH: Yeah, I saw that. I really don't remember being really conscious of it until '68 or '69.

BF: Yeah.

JH: I guess the TET offensives and all that sort of thing.

BF: Anyway I graduated in, in, in the summer of '66. And went away to college in North Carolina and, ah, partied, ah, and flunked out. And, ah, came back and, ah, that was in January '67. I came back to Huntington and moved back in with my parents. Got a job at Gino's Pizza, made pizzas this, ah, winter and spring of '67 and, ah, [clicking noise in background]

JH: Who, who, was your draft status at this time, do you recall?

BF: I don't really remember, I, I can't even remember. I guess the lottery and stuff was in '67. Ah, because I remember it was in, ah, it was in like June of '67 and I had been back after flunking out of college, ah, about five months making

pizzas and really not knowing whether I wanted to go back to college in the fall of '67 or get a job in a factory or what, you know. Ah, I was, I do remember being interested in social service work as early as, as you know, a year after I graduated from high school. I had to cut up, sounded interesting to me, but I, you know, after my experience in college, ah, you know, at that time I was thinking that, ah, maybe I wasn't college material, because I flunked out. Ah, in retrospect you know, after awhile I realized that I had the capabilities to do college work, it just the reason I flunked I goofed off. But at that time I didn't. I, I had some doubts about whether college was for me or not. I really didn't know what I was going to do.

JH: Yeah.

BF: I remember it was in June, early summer of '67. [JH coughs] And if the nubmers hadn't, if the lottery hadn't happened it was going to happen soon. I recollect more that it already happened, and I had a low number, double digits or maybe, ah, triple digits but, but in the, ah, you know, one hundred something. (Ah huh.) I don't remember what June 23, was, my birthday, but, ah, but anyway it looked like I was going to get drafted probably. Ah, and, ah, brother-in-law who was a career military officer at that time had a talk and he knew about my, ah, indecision about what I was going to do with my life and, ah, I certainly didn't want to live with my parents any longer. I was a year out of high school. I was 19 years old and, ah, I wanted to get on with my life.

And he suggested that I volunteer for the draft because at that, that point if you volunteered for the draft you only had to spend two years instead of three years.

JH: Ah hun.

BF: If you went in, you know, the regular army person had to sign up for three years, but the draft was two years. And he was saying the advantage to volunteering for the draft, cause it looked like I was going to get drafted anyway, would be that I could pick the time that I was going to go in.

JH: Right.

BF: And, ah, so I thought about it after he had that talk with me about volunteering. It was in July I remember when, ah, a bunch of us boys were driving down here 4th avenue. All of a sudden I just said well I think I am going to do it and I hollered out in the car, "who wants to go to the army with me?" And this one guy, ah, Don Tipton, "I'll go." It kind of shocked me. [JH laughs] But, ah, both of us kind of spur the moment thing.

JH: Had he been talking about it much before that? [laughs]

BF: No, no. None of us talked about it. You know, I had that conversation with my brother-in-law about a month prior to that and, ah, been thinking about it and finally sometime in July, I had been back six months, I was making a buck and a quarter a buck fifty an hour and making pizzas and, ah, there was no where else. I'm still at home, I was nineteen.

Ah, so I just said, I thought I'd go and I mentioned it to my buddies and, ah, I guess I probably had this little, this little pipe dream in my head that I thought all five of us would go, you know.

JH: Right, like in the movies.

BF: Yeah, like in the movies, but there was only two of us stupid enough. [JH laughs] And Don said that he'd go and so like the next day Don and I went down to ah, Cabell County Courthouse to the selective service, there was in the basement of the courthouse and signed up together and we both decided Don was, Don had, he graduated with me in '66 and he's working somewhere at some dead end job too. And, ah, but we both decided that we wanted to, to, this was mid-July of '67 both decided we wanted some time to party before we went into the service so we both decided we would go in first of September. And, ah, this is mid-July and they signed us up. And I went back to the pizza parlor and told them that I was going in the army and I worked another month from that August. Then I quit. and then August into the next two weeks, half a month before I went in, I took that time off and saw all my friends and partied and stuff like that. Still at that time I knew Vietnam was going on. Yeah, you know, late summer of '67, I had no concept about me going there, even though I was going into the army. And, ah, Don and I went in together. We got sworn in at the Ventura Hotel in Ashland, it's no longer there, they've torn

it down. And, ah, one thing that I didn't mention in the other interview that I thought was real funny that we were sitting in the Ventura Hotel going through the process you know, we had our physicals and, and we saw the "shrink" and the "shrink" asked us if we were crazy and we said no, you know. Probably should of

JH: [Laughs] Was that about the extent of it?

BF: Probably should have said yes. Yeah, you know. I don't know if he is a shrink or not, he's probably an M.D. ah, and ah, but anyway we were up in this big room after all that waiting for the swearing in ceremony, and this guy comes in, he's obviously a biker, you know, he's got a leather jacket and engineer's boots and stuff. And it was a sergeant, a recruiting sergeant, you know, sitting up in the front of the room and this guy came in and, ah, ah, sergeant looked at him and didn't like him, he was real greasy and you know, ah, dressed like that. He said, "Where'd you park your motorcycle?" And the guy turned right around and just as dead panned as he could he said to the sergeant, "Where did you park your fuckin' tank?" [Both laugh] We weren't sworn in at that time, so the sergeant couldn't do anything. But of course the guy got some hell on the bus down. But everybody cracked up, it was so funny and he, ah, kind of slouched down. But anyway we, we, we were right there at the Ventura Hotel, I remember, ah, night before the swearing in ceremonies, it was a weekday, a work day. I remember my dad coming down and, ah, he and I shook hands. He was real

proud of me. My dad was a, my dad was a military man in World War II in the navy, yeah. Ah, in the Pacific, ah, on a ship and he was real gung-ho, you know, kinda heedless, yeah, he was real disappointed when I flunked out of college and he, he had this you know, let's make a man out of him and stuff. And dad and I were probably real close, probably the closest we'd been since I was in junior high school. He and I were pretty far apart in high school because I was pretty much of, ah, of a juvenile delinquent in high school. And, ah, he came down and he and I shook hands and, and, ah, then they swore us in and, ah, we got on the bus and, ah, rode, ah, from Ashland, Kentucky to Fort Knox, Kentucky and, and, ah, went through basic and those are pretty fond memories of those times in basic training. I mean it was a pain, you know, you ran everywhere and basic training back then, I don't know what is now, but back then it was eight weeks.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And, ah, we, ah, you know, we did, we, we had exer, we got up in the morning, we ran two miles in the morning before the sun came up. And we had to go through all, you know, the low crawl pit and all this stuff. And then we got to eat breakfast. And we had like ten minutes, fifteen minutes to eat breakfast. I mean, it was just go go go all the time. And I remember during the tie it was a pain and God, I hated it. You know, said, "Oh, I can't wait." Why did I, why did we do this? This is crazy but after basic, you know, we made it through. I was probably in the best shape



I was even in in my whole life. You know, probably ran fifteen miles a day.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Total. Ah, running two

JH: With boots on?

BF: With boots on. Run two miles in the morning and two miles in the evening before supper and then all the training we ran every place. Yeah, fond memories of that. Made and met some friends, ah, acquaintances and, ah, then we got sent to radio school which was right across the street from my basic training company, and was there for seven weeks and, ah, some pretty fond memories of that too. And that was in, ah, let's see, I was in radio school at Thanksgiving time and I, I wasn't able to come home at Thanksgiving. Ah, but at Christmas time, I was finishing up radio school. Ah, radio school, basic was September and October of '67, and radio school was November and December. And, ah, I got to come home for Christmas, first time I been home since I went in first of September. Ah, rode the bus from Louisville. Ah, we caught a bus at the post and rode the bus into the Grayhound station in Louisville and then from there home. And spent Christmas at home. And then, ah, went back to Fort Knox and at that time they shipped me off to, like early January, after New Years they shipped me out in '68, January '68, I was sent to Fort Ord, Georgia, which is outside of Augusta, to a teletype school. And I was there

for ten weeks, which was January, February, ah, most of March cause I didn't start there until, you know, the first or second week of January. And, ah, so it was the rest of January, February and most of March and at the end of March me and a bunch of other people were shipped to, ah, Fort Benning, Georgia, ah, to form up these, ah, ATC's, ah, Air something, Air Traffic Support Groups. And what we were suppose to do is be, ah, you know, seventeen men in each support group and we were, we were flight followers and air traffic controllers and, ah, ah, teletype operators and stuff like that. And we were suppose to be support groups in 'Nam, ah, for air traffic for, for air, air traffic companies. And, ah, we didn't talk much about 'Nam, it was funny. We, ah, knew we were going probably, you know. Ah, nobody ever, was really kind of hush-hush. (Ah huh.) Nobody ever talked about going to Vietnam. Remember at that time, ah, by that time, my sister and her husband, ah, the career military guy that was talking to me the year before about going into the service, they were stationed at Fort Benning and, ah, he had, he and my sister and their infant son, ah, lived in officers quarters, a nice townhouse apartment [coughs] on the base. And, ah, I was the morning report clerk and I had to get up at 5:30 in the morning to catch an early breakfast and then do the morning reports for, for it's like we were, we were forming up there and they were sending all these guys to this one company at Fort Benning and that's why we were there April, May, June, and July, four months at Fort Benning waiting till all these guys to come

in. And, ah, to go to 'Nam as these seventeen men groups.

\_\_\_\_\_ It was gonna be like ten of these groups or 107 men to form a company, ten or twelve groups, somewhere around two hundred men to form a company. But people that, that had the skills that they needed were graduating at different times from different schools (Ah huh.) other schools around the area. Then they were forming up there. I was the morning report clerk and I got up at 5:30, had breakfast and would go type the morning reports for all the detachments, ah, get done about 7:30 or 8:00 and, and run the reports down to battalion and then I was free from 8:00 in the morning, ah, until 11 o'clock at night. And I didn't have to pull any KP or any other guard duty or anything like that. And I used to go up to my sister's, spend the day out there lounging around in the back yard drinking beer and, ah, you know, hanging out just,

\_\_\_\_\_ JH: Pretty good deal.

BF: Yeah, real nice. The only thing I didn't really like about it was that, ah, that was the summer of '67. There were a lot of riots going on in the country and so they, they were training us about two or three hours in the aft, it was about a four week period there, for about a month where they'd train us in the afternoon in riot control. And it was about that, that was in June I believe in '67 that we were doing all that and you know, different companies were

getting shipped out to Detroit or D.C., you know, wherever the riots were going on. By that time we were, knew we were going to 'Nam. We'd probably be going sometime the late summer. And, ah, what struck me as odd was that I wasn't that much anxious about going to 'Nam as I was about going to an American city.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: To fight Americans you know, the riot. We never, my, our, our unit never got called to go to any riot control or anything like that. But guys that I had met been there, and, ah,

JH: So were you like, when you were doing this were you like on some kind of emergency call? Ready so you, be like ready to go?

BF: Ready to go and they were suppose to take us to the airbase. I, I knew some guys that had to go to Detroit or D.C. or somewhere. Yeah, you were on call whenever they needed you and I suppose they had some sort of list. (Ah huh.) You know, about who would go and I knew some guys who had to go. Ah, talked to them when they got back and they didn't like it. Ah, (Hmmm.) but any way we went, ah, it was in, ah, July, I remember the date it was July 30th, ah, 1967. And one morning, and it was really crazy because we really didn't know which day we would be going to 'Nam, and no one would ever tell us exactly what day we'd be going, until about five or six days before we left, then they tell us the date. And, ah, still didn't have any feelings about I was

going some place where I might be killed. It was really weird. And, they'd put us on buses, we formed up, we had all our gear, you know, we had a back pack with, ah, with all your standard issued shit, and we had to pack all that and we formed up on the company street and got into buses and the buses drove us down to the airbase at Fort Benning, then we lined up and we got on this big C-141, a four engine jet military transport. No windows, riding backwards, ah, the seats faced backwards (Ah huh.) and we flew. We just took off. It was, it was so bizarre. I mean, you know, you see movies about people going off to the war and there's parades and bands and, and it was, I mean, there was nobody there. You know, it was just a routine, it was like cattles to the slaughter I guess. Yeah, I mean, there was no family there waving bye, no sweetheart \_\_\_\_\_, stuff like that. We were just like a bunch of dumb cattle I guess. And, ah, marched on to that plane and that plane took and we flew to Anchorage, Alaska and there was something wrong with the plane so we stopped there. We were about four or five hours there and we visited with some, ah, airforce guys in their quarters. Flew from Anchorage about four hours after we landed there we flew from Anchorage to Japan to Tokyo outside Tokyo and then there was something wrong with the plane there too. We were at, so we had to wait there four or five hours in Japan. No, nobody went into town or anything, we weren't allowed to. Ah, I guess they were figuring some people wouldn't come back, [laughs] you know.

JH: [laughs] It strikes me as kind of being unsettling on, on the plane your going over there on, something to be going wrong with it all the time.

BF: Yeah, it's me and my best buddy the whole trip over from Georgia to Alaska and Alaska and Japan and Japan and Long Binh, we, ah, would play chess. Ah, those little magnetic chess boards, played chess. And, ah, I remember there were some guys who were pretty uptight and my God, there was 200 of us on this plane.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Plus all the cargo, you know, ah, and, ah, there were some guys uptight about it and scared and some guys didn't give a shit some guys were looking forward to it. But I, my feeling were that, you know, this is, I was in the army and the army was using me and this was where they were going to send me to use me, you know. I had no idea about, God, I'm going somewhere where, I going to, I had no feelings about like I was going to a war that I didn't approve of or I was going someplace I might get killed or anything like that. That was just, you know, at that time they had trained me very well and I was, I was a good soldier. I mean they told me to do something I did it. And, ah, and, ah, this was just another duty station. I'd been to Fort Ord, I'd been to Fort Benning, now I was gonna go to Fort Vietnam. (Ah huh.) I guess, I don't know, I didn't have any feelings about it. We landed there and the crazy thing is, you know,

we spent four month form, forming us up, yeah, at Fort Benning and all our specific tasks, as soon as we got there they split us all up immediately. We landed at Long Binh and, ah, me and my, my good buddy and oh a dozen of us or so were assigned to the 125th Air Traffic Company which was stationed down at Bien Hoa. And they had a platoon in each in corps, I-corp, II-Corp, III-Corp, IV-corp and, ah, I got me and my good buddy were assigned to, ah, ah, II corps, which was the platoon headquarters is in Cam Ranh Bay so we got to Long Binh on the 31st of July on the 30th of July with the time changes, ah, we still left and went to Georgia on the 30th but we got there on the 30th of July of '67, '68, I'm sorry, and, ah, bus ride over to Bien Hoa, Bien Hoa was pretty close to Lang to Long Binh, to the 125th Air Traffic Company headquarters in Bien Hoa. And we stayed there one or two days, but on the first of August we were assigned to the II-Corp Platoon, me and my buddy Doug and on the 1st of August, two day in country, we flew to Cam Ranh Bay, we got there on the 1st and, ah, we went up to platoon headquarters. That was a wild place, I mean, they, they were allowed to have booze in their hootches and their company commander or the, the platoon commander or major was, ah, real laxed and not very military at all. We got up there and there were parties going on up there and everything. They had a movie on the basketball court. And, ah, it was real nice. And, ah, my buddy Doug and I were there we were meeting the new guys, meeting the guys who had been there for a while, and, ah, drinking with them and partying with them

and, and we were all wondering, they had, they had four squads outa Cam Ranh but the two platoon headquarters was in Cam Ranh and that platoon had squads in ah, in ah, Tuy Hoa, Ban Me Thuot, Da Lat, I think it was Phan Thiet or Phan Rang, I can't remember. It was south of the Cam Ranh coast. And at that time, summer of '68, which was after TET, TET was in January, February of '68. (Ah huh.) Ah, big TET. And, ah, at that time of the four squads most of them, Tuy Hoa and Phan Thiet or Phan Rang, whichever one it was were on the coast and they were quiet, no action going on there and Da Lat was this little French town built by the French in the mountains, a kind of a resort, best restaurants, best warehouses and everything and everybody wanted to go to Da Lat because it was beautiful. And nothing going on there. And then Ban Me Thuot there was stuff going on there all the time. Ban Me Thuot was about a hundred miles up in the mountains from Cam Ranh coast, it was about 20 to 25 miles from the Cambodian border and 26 miles from the Ho Chi Minh trail. And, ah, it was real hot, ah, there and, ah, I remember we were at Cam Ranh for a couple of days, got there like on the first of August, and we were at Cam Ranh for a couple of days and we were wondering where they were going to ship us, me and Doug. And all the guys said, "Hey, you know, the best place is right here, next best place is Da Lat, and then, ah, Phan Rang, and Tuy Hoa are okay but you just, you, anyplace is fine, but you don't want to go to Ban



Me Thuot, because they get hit alot." And the next day they told me I was going to Ban Me Thuot. [background noises] And I went, "Oh shit!" I think it was, that was the first time, you know, I, I'd been at, at Fort Benning in Georgia for four months, knowing that I was going to Nam, but feeling nothing about it. Flying over and at Long Binh and Binh Hoa and Cam Ranh feeling nothing about it even after I was in the country, for what, three days. (Ah huh.) When they finally told me that I was going to this place where they were saying that it was the only place in the II Corps section of the 125th ATC that you didn't want to go. And I, you know, I knew why because they got hit a lot, you know, hit being mortars and rockets at night. And it finally dawned on me that I was in a place where people were shooting at each other and there was people out there that, that wanted me dead. [JH laughs] And I'd, finally, I finally woke up and smelled the coffee I guess. (Ah huh.) Wow! This is, this is the real thing. And, ah, the very next day I, I, I got up, let's see I flew up there in a C-123 which is a two engine prop troop carrier landed at East Field. Ban Me Thuot is a province capitol, was a province capitol I suppose it still is, I don't know, Ah, up there in the central highlands, ah, looks a lot like West Virginia, real green and, and, ah, big hills, not quite mountains yet, but big hills. And, ah, it was a Mac-V compound there, and then there was a, there was a, a military base at this city field, which was a small strip in the city and there was a, a OH-1 company there, a light observation plane called it, I

remember they called it the Pterodactyl, little piper cubs, you know.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: The guys had to fly at a hundred miles per hour across the tree tops. They got shot up a lot. And there was a, there was a, there was a slick company there a hu, Huey Gunship company there, I can't remember what they called them. And that was a city field and the strip was small and the 123 I flew up in was too big to land at city strip so we landed at East Field, which is about five miles east of the city, a bigger strip. A lot of grunts form up there a lot of times you know, a 130 came in there, 123s caribous, ah, and [noise in background] I remember that the guys, the squad, the 125th ATC, with the platoon headquarters in Cam Ranh, that each squad had four men in it. And they were stationed there at Ban Me Thuot, four men. And, ah, I was replacing this one guy and, and he was real anxious to get on the plane and I got in the, ah, the, ah, the three quarter ton truck where these two guys, both of them from California both of them named Smitty, ah, picked me up they dropped the other guy off that was taking my place. I got in the truck and we were driving from East Field back to City Field where the van was, Air Traffic Control van was. And, ah, ah, I remember I was asking them, you know, what's this place like, because I heard all these stories at Cam Ranh.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And, ah, they were saying well it's pretty hot and one guy said "Yeah, a few months ago we had over run." And I'm going "Oh shit!" [JH laughs] Of course that was during TET that they got over run. And, ah, ah, at that time the, the squad was quartered at the Mac V compound. And, ah, [laughs] the first book that I read in Vietnam was Catch-22. [laughs] And cause one of the guys from, from one of Smitty's from California had it. And my first night there I was, I couldn't sleep, cause I was waiting for the rockets to hit, you know. Believing all the stories that I got told at Cam Ranh. Smitty said here read this, Smitty was a real, ah, anti-war person \_\_\_\_\_ [laughs] And I read that, that was real bizarre. And, ah, we got kicked out of the Mac V compound. See what it was whenever they'd asked us to pull guard duty and they'd ask us to blouse our pants and wear our insignia and wear our hats and we'd say, "Well I don't know you have to talk to my CO." And they'd say, "Where's your CO?" And we'd say "Cam Ranh, a hundred miles away," and they'd get pissed and walk off. And so finally instead of you know trying to keep fighting us, ah, [squeaking noise in background] they kicked us out. You have to find some place else to live. And we moved in with the army barracks, it was the support group to the, ah, the, ah, observation company and the, and the gunship company there at city field by city field compound.

JH: This is you and the TCA?

BF: And another guy, ah, and, ah, we moved in there and, ah, the same thing happen there they wanted us to pull the guard duty and stuff and of course we wanted to do that. So we said, "No", and they'd say, "Who's your CO?" And we say, you know, "Major so and so." "Where is he?" "Cam Ranh." Well shit. They'd walk off. And they got pissed at us and they kicked us out and then we went to live with the Air Force in this real nice hotel in downtown Ban Me Thuot and that was nice. That was real nice. And the Airforce didn't kick us out, it was just that we were army and, and they got some more people in and they had to have our space that we were using in the hotel. And at that time we were without a place to live. We'd been, you know, kicked out of the two army places, ah, and with no space for us at the air force base there was no place else for us to live. And we, the, the, the city field compound where the air strip was and the gun ship company and the light and the observation company were in a compound that surrounded the airstrip [background noise] and inside that compound was another small compound where the Vietnamese Air Force were stationed. (Ah huh.) And that's where our \_\_\_\_\_ following radio van was and it was kind of an area oh about, ah, it might have been 30 yards wide and forty yards long. A compound inside the compound, where the Vietnamese Air Force were and that's where our van was. And there was this old, ah, supply shack, about 20 yards away from our van so lend of side one,

begin side 2] ... And, ah, Bill borrowed a bottle refrigerator and a hot plate and, and that was great because, ah, we hadn't had anybody over us, you know, the Vietnamese Air Force was there with us. V-HAB, ah, we were on our own there and it was really great. The crazy thing was four of us there and we had three vehicles. [both laugh] We had, and there had to be somebody in the van all the time. So everybody had their own wheels.

JH: \_\_\_\_\_

BF: We had, we had a deuce and a half a big deuce and a half truck, two and half ton truck, and we had two, no we had a one and quarter ton truck and a three quarter ton truck. And with one person being in the van, run, running the radios in the van, ah, that meant that the three of us that weren't working at any given time had our own vehicle. And we'd go in everywhere. We, ah, there were some real neat people ther called Montagnard, and they were the mountain people and basically they were the niggers of Vietnam.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Ah, the Vietnamese people looked down on 'em, ah, their features were different from the Vietnamese. They were more mongoloid looking, ah, Mongolian, not mongoloid, but Mongolian looking. Darker skin, a more primitive people. But they were real mellow kind of people and I remember I bought a blanket from one of them that they made and brought back and gave it to my mom. Ah, they sold beads and stuff and, and, ah,

JH: Montagnard?

BF: Yeah, Montagnards. Mountain people. [pause] And, ah, just was there. Ban Me Thuot. We got hit a lot. We built our own bunker, boy we built a bunker that nothing could hit us in. Right next to that supply hooch that, that we changed into our living quarters. We traded, you could trade there, you could trade for anything. Ah, we had access to, ah, guns.

JH: Really?

BF: Any kind of gun. We had some wild guns. I had a grease gun with a silencer. Ah, we had a Thompson sub-machine gun, ah, had a little Derringer had a, had a pearl handled colt-45. I mean we just got these guns, it was easy to get guns. And, ah, we got them from the Green Berets and how we got theirs is we swapped with them. Ah, Cam Ranh would bring us up you know, a couple of five gallon tubs of ice cream you know, or a couple of cases of beer. And we'd take it over to the, to the Green Berets and swap that for guns. And we'd swap the guns with other people for building materials and stuff like that. Anyway we, we, we bartered for this, ah, the engineers the civilian engineers over there had this back hoe with them. They came over and dug us a hole, and we bartered for some plywood and build a box and lowered that down in the hole. And filled it all up around and we had a bench inside the box and everything. And, ah, then we bargain for some for some, ah, some metal runways. They're

called PCF \_\_\_\_\_ [both laugh] Cause there's a drug called that. But it was metal runway. Portable runway that hooked together strips of it. They were, they were twelve feet long and three feet wide and, ah, we got some, some big timbers and we put layers of this PCF and timber above our box and then we had a hole that went down, ah, an entrance way that went down and turned left and then turned right into our box. And whenever we'd get hit mostly it was mortars, it was rubber plantations around three sides of city field compound.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And, ah, Charlie would come down, ah, and come at night and come into the rubber plantations and launched mortars and rockets at us from the plantations. They'd launce a dozen mortars, a couple of rockets and spert. Ah, but it was so quiet at night and we were real close to the perimeter, between our hootch, ah, and the perimeter was a road and the, ah, the pads for the Heuys and, ah, then the burn, the perimeter and it wasn't, ah, wasn't a hundred yards, you know, and Charlie was another hundred yards into the rubber plantation, you know, so it was quiet at night. When we got, we slept so lightly that we got to the point where we could hear, ah, the first "Duhm" of the mortar going off and we'd be in our hole by the time the first mortar landed.

JH: Hmmm.

BF: You know. So it ws relatively safe you, you know. If the first one didn't get us we'd be okay.

JH: Right.

BF: You know, unless Charlie came in, unless there was a number of them. There was a lot, there was a lot of BIs there. I mean they would, ah, had to, had, you know, a few hundred maybe a thousand troops over run us at that point, because I guess when they got over run during TET they beefed things up.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Because the perimeter, I mean it had, ah, a double fence with constantino wire between it and on top of the fences, and then another row or two of Constantino wire on the outside of the burn. And then claymore mines all the way around it. And then one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight guard posts with fifty caliber machine guns in 'em. It would have taken a lot of 'em to over run us. And, ah, so we were fairly safe. Ah, as far as having to do any kind of close combat, but we would get shot at. And you know some weeks we'd get, we'd only get hit one or two nights a week. And some weeks we'd get hit three or four or five nights a week, you know.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: There was no rhyme nor reason to it. Probably on purpose, you know. Didn't want to set a pattern.

JH: Right.

BF: Because we'd find them and waste 'em and, ah, I, ah, I, interestingly enough I have fond memories of Ban Me Thuot,



you know. Cause day time hours it was not dangerous. We'd go you know, we weren't confined to the compound. We'd get in the jeep or get in the truck and go down to, to the city. And, ah, they had this big open air market where you could buy anything from shoe laces to booze to air conditioners, a lot of black market stuff.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Used to go, use to have a theatre downtown Ban Me Thuot, the only theatre down there, ah, where they'd show these, ah, Chinese movies and, and Japanese movies and stuff like that. These were all these Kung Fu kinds of things with a real ugly bad dude and a hero and a damsel in distress kind of like, ah, old time American cowboy movies.

JH: Did they have them dubbed in English?

BF: Some of them were, some them weren't.

JH: This, this probably, ah, something obvious to you, but I'm confused about it. Why, why was there no shelling in the day time or, or very much anyway?

BF: I don't think that there was any, ah, NVA around, North Vietnamese were regulars okay. I think it was mostly just VCs, Viet Cong Charlie and, ah, I think that they were probably limited in numbers and what they would do is that they'd come in at night. They could sneak in at night.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And, and throw some shit at us and then split, under the cover of darkness.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Ah, I, that's my impression. It was a pretty secure place. I remember one time, ah, we were at downtown Ban Me Thuot and we missed curfew. We were, we were restauranters, a nice restaurant downtown that gave great steaks, it was probably buffalo steak, but we didn't care, tasted good. (Ah huh.) They marinated it or something. And we missed curfew, we had been drinking some, some, some, ah, 33 beer. Vietnamese beer found, finally found 33. And it was, it was pretty rotten beer, but, ah, a lot of times is was all you could get.

JH: Right.

BF: Preserved with formaldehyde.

JH: Oooh.

BF: It was, ah, but we had been drinking some beer and we said, ah, the hell with curfew. Cause you had to be inside your compound at a certain time and we missed it. And, ah, we finally left the restaurant and it was after dark and it was a real shock to me. I, I had not seen this before cause I had always been inside my compound after dark. And we rode, there was this, there was a circle in the middle of the city, a traffic circle. And we're driving, you know, knowing that we were going to catch some shit from the guy at the ga, at the guard, the gate at city compounds. And we come into the circle and the moon was three-quarters or

coming. There was some light. We looked around and there were tanks everywhere.

JR: Hum.

BF: I mean you know, it's a, you drive along and all a sudden there's tanks all over the place, so, Ban Me Thuot was pretty well secure. I mean there was a lot of at night the Americans would come in their tanks and sit around the city and secure, there was a Mac V compound there which was pretty big. You know, they'd wanna secure the big brass there and shit, I guess.

JR: Ah hum.

BF: Ah, [coughs] but I guess that's why we didn't get hit in the day. Occasionally you'd catch a round, you know, there'd be a, a VC in the woods somewhere or something, you know, and fire a couple of rounds at, ah, but they were pretty vulnerable because there was so much support there. There was a Huey gunship company, ah, there were all the tanks and the hardware and, and in the woods on the outskirts of Ban Me Thuot there was a, a South Vietnamese regular army basic training camp.

JR: Humm.

BF: Where they taught you know basic training. There was a lot of military there, you know, a lot of, a lot of good guys there. And, ah, it was pretty secure. I supposed after they got over run in TET they beefed it up real big. (Ah hum.) And so Charlie would come run in during the, during

the night into the, the rubber plantations were this thick, just the rubber tree they were. I think they were owned by Michelin. You know, still producing. Michelin wasn't gonna loose a profit just because there was a war and, ah,

JH: Why were they there in the first place?

BF: Right, right. But, ah, when I went up there they, they said, you only have to stay six months and nobody in, in II-IV 125th Air Traffic Company had to stay at Ban Me Thuot more than six months because it was the one hot squad out of all of 'em and I ended up staying there about seven or eight months or so and finally got me out, and I went back and spent my last four months or so at Cam Ranh and that was great because I layed on the beach everyday or four or five days a week. Got a great tan, learned how to skin dive, we got some, ah, some, ah, spear guns from a mail order company in California, some good maps, some snorkels and fins. And we went skin diving. Killed a bunch of, ah, fish and we had a Papasan up in our kitchen that would tell us what we could eat and what we couldn't.

JH: Hmmm.

BF: And we killed, ah, there was barracuda, there was octopus, there was sand sharks, there was, ah, there was some, there was some deadly fish there, there were sea snakes and stuff like that but it was so beautiful, you know, it was really beautiful.

JH: Real clear water?

BF: Ah, South China Sea is gorgeous. It was absolutely gorgeous. I mean my, my hooch at Cam Ranh, I'd wake up every morning, we were up on a hill overlooking the bay. Well, you could look one way in the bay but my hooch, the windows on one side of my hooch up on top of this hill looked right out over, you know, South China Sea. I'd wake up in the morning and look out there and see the beautiful, just beautiful blue ocean.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: White sandy beaches, I mean it was like I was in Acapulco or somewhere. You know, it was really nice, at that time, in the, in the spring and early summer of 1969 Cam Ranh was secure. [coughs] So it was not threat of any kind of, at that time of any kind of, ah, action or anything like that. It was, you know, ah, basically like, like being on post like somewhere in the states except it was prettier [laughs] you know, beaches and beautiful ocean and stuff like that.

JH: Ah

BF: And on the beach, the main beach there at Cam Ranh. I mean the military ran a pavillion that sold beer, hot dogs, and hamburgers. I mean it was like Coney Island or something. (Right.) There was picnic tables and umbrellas and [squeaking noise] it was really nice. And, ah, I guess my year in Vietnam was, ah, I never did get political or against the war. I do remember when I was in Ban Me Thuot and it was early. [background noise] I'd just been there,

you know, I went there in early August it was like September, October of 1968. There was this guy walking around wanting to know if people who wanted to, to register not to vote in, ah, the 68 election in, ah, ah, Nixon, whoever ran with Nixon.

JH: Humphrey.

BF: Humphrey, yeah, Nixon and Humphrey. I was twenty at the time at that time the eighteen year old vote hadn't been passed yet and so I couldn't vote.

JH: Right.

BF: I remember that, well, I remember thinking like, hell no, I don't wanna vote for these people, they're going to keep me here. You know, or something like that. And, ah, it was some scary times, but there's also some good times, you know. And we got close to each other it's, I was close to some of the guys that I didn't know I was with in the states. See we all came at different times and left at different times and, and, ah, but I do remember that, ah, it was real, you know, you talked about short time, you know, and, ah, you made it over here six months, you're over your hump, you know, then you got down to be ninety days then you were short and your last month you were real short. I remember I knew the army was going to let me out. They had an early out program if you came back with less than two or three months to go on your hitch and you wanted out they'd let you out, you didn't have to serve it. You know, if, if your year in 'Nam was up before your hitch was up they'd let

you out. And so I knew I was gonna get out at that time I was an E-4, ah, in my MOS, ah, ah, radio-teletype operator. It was specialist until you got to E-5 and then it was, you had the three stripes, be a sergeant. And it was in, ah, I was scheduled to leave on the 30th of July, 1969 and it was around the, ah, end of June, the first of July, they said that I was up for E-5 and I had less than a month to go in, in the military. And at that time in the army promotions from E, from, from E-1, ah, up through E-4 you don't have to take any test or anything you just go get, you know, if you qualify you were given a promotion, but to go from E-4 to E-5 at that time in my MOS you had to go take some tests. You know, and you had to study and take tests and stuff like that. And my sergeant came to me and said, "I want to nominate you for E-5." This was like in early July and, ah, ah, '69 I was gonna be out at the end of July. I said fine, great, you know, what's in it for me?

JH: Huh, [laughs] you gotta take these tests.

BF: You, you gotta take these test you gotta go, I had to fly down to company headquarters in Bien Hoa and take these tests and I, I would have had done some studying if I really wanted it. And I thought about it for about a day and went back to my sergeant and I said Sarg, I don't care. I'm gettin out in twenty-five days. You say these test, you know, ah, won't be able to schedule 'em for another week and then I won't get results back for a couple of weeks and what you saying is that I may get E-5 about a week before I get

out the army. And I said it ain't worth it. You know, he looked at me like I was crazy because he was the lifer.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: You know, and he would say well you might want to re-up.

[JH laughs] And I said, I said, get serious. You know, and, ah, so I didn't do that. I, I, they let me out as a E-4. It was crazy. That guy was a son-of-a-bitch.

Sergeant Baker. I will never forget Sergeant Baker. I've forgotten a lot of the names of a lot of the guys. It's interesting I've forgotten names of some of the guys that I was, that were, that I was buddies with. Ah, but I remember this guy. I'm certain was that he was just a pain in the ass, son-of-a-bitch, lazy. Remember during the rainy season at Cam Ranh the whole hill would blow off sand. And, ah, during the rainy season there was one period of time where, where we had to stay up like 48 or 60 hours in a row filling sand bags so our hootches wouldn't slide off the hill.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And of course the, the, the NCOs and the officers, you know, were not gonna be out there in the rain filling sand bags so they had all us pions do it. Ah, but somebody had to run the van, you know, the flight following van and so sergeants, you know, the NCOs went up, up on the top of the hill to run the damn van and they couldn't do it. They fucked it up royal. You know, they had, they had flights so screwed up and nothin, you know. That was the job they were



trained to do that some years back but they, never. That's the thing about the army is that once you get to be an E-6 or something you never really have to do your job.

JH: Ah hun.

BF: That you were trained for because you get six, eight, ten, twenty, thirty men doing it for you. But in times of crisis, like that rainy season they had to do it and they screwed it up. I was a shift it up and I was, I remember a couple of times, three or four times during that time, ah, that we were filling sand bags, you know. Sergeant Baker come down and say, "Fox you need to come up to the van right now and get this straightened out." [JH laughs] You know. So I put down my shovel and trudge up to the van and, and me, I'd get somebody to go with me. And we'd go up there and get a, take a couple of hours and get it all squared away back in order, you know, and then never got a word of appreciation from 'em like thanks, you know, or God, you know.

JH: [laughs] Then go sour when you're screwed up. [voice in background]

BF: Yean, we'd get it straight for em and then we'd go back out in the rain and fill sand bags and they'd fuck it up again. [JH laughs] It was crazy. And this Baker guy, I remember one time he was, he was he wanting some, he was wanting to build a bunker for our ammo, you know. We didn't have much ammo, we had guns, you know, had a couple of M-50 machine

guns and, and some, ah, we didn't have too many M-16s you know, the modern light weapon. We had M-14s, the old wooden one, I think we're the only company left in 'Nam that had that old M-14, wooden piece of shit. Although I can't really \_\_\_\_\_ it was really, it was heavy but it was accurate as hell.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: That M-14 was the most accurate rifle and I had some experience with guns growing up. My dad collected guns and I belonged to a gun club and I was a member of the NRA when I was growing up, took safety lessons. And that M-14 was accurate. But anyway he wanted to build this ammo bunker, and you know, Cam Ranh at that time was real secure, there was no action and we all rolled our eyes and said, "Oh Jesus Christ, this is another," you know, "nair he's got up his ass." And he wanted to build it inside in the side of the hill and then sandbag the side you know the, the half of it that wasn't underneath and he wanted six layers of sand bags all over that you know. And I was the shift leader and I had some responsibility and, and, ah, we dug his friggin hole for 'im and they had a, a backhoe up there that they used to put this metal box in, you know, metal box that they shipped stuff over in, big boxes probably, ah, six feet tall by about, ah, six foot deep, five foot wide, you know. And they, they were container things that they shipped, shipped

stuff over with and they emptied them and made, made nice  
little storage \_\_\_\_\_.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Well we got it in there for him and covered it up and put  
like one layer of sand bags over and he came over and he  
said, "Put another layer of sand bags on there." So we,  
gosh, okay, put another layer of sand bags over it and he  
came and said, "Put a third layer over there." I went,  
"Jesus Christ Sang, this is good enough." I knew that was  
the wrong thing to do. [JH laughs] He said, "Just for that  
Fox, you are going to fill 200, I think, 2 or 300 sand bags  
all by yourself tonight after duty." Fuck you, you know,  
after, you know, me, me and about five of my buddies went on  
we filled 'em all in about an hour, you know. He was a son  
of a bitch. I hated him.

JH: Career army.

BF: Yean. I think he was a big wimp. [noise in background] If  
he had been out somewhere where there was action he'd a got  
fragged.

JH: Really.

BF: I'd guarantee it.

JH: \_\_\_\_\_ [inaudible].

BF: They wouldn't of put up with that shit, that wouldn't put,  
ah, Grutts wouldn't of put up with his bull shit. We put up  
with it cause we basically had real soft cake duty and  
nobody was shooting at us at Cam Ranh or anything like that.

I mean if he had been at Ban Me Thuot somebody would have dragged his ass you know or somebody wouldn't have covered him, you know.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Just not cover him, let him get off, because he was a prick, ah,

JH: Umm, [pause] so you spent your last, I guess once pre, pretty much once you got to Cam Ranh Bay it was all

BF: Yeah.

JH: It was great, well

BF: \_\_\_\_\_ [inaudible]

JH: Well, you were going home.

BF: Yeah. I knew I was gonna go home. I knew I was in a secure place. Ah, it got, got towards the end at Cam Ranh we got a new CO down there and he was a little bit more military and got a little picky, ah, you know. Where my buddy Doug, ah, he stayed at Cam Ranh. We got, we'd been together ever since Fort Gordon and, ah, when we got to Cam Ranh, when we first got in-country, shipped me to Ban Me Thuot and he stayed at Cam Ranh and, ah, when I came back to Cam Ranh he was, he had been complaining for a couple of weeks, "Ship me out, ship me out, I can't take this bullshit." Cause when he was at Cam Ranh it was real lax, but you know we did our job and they did their job and it was no big deal. But they weren't real military and then, his last, the last month there, that he was there, ah, they had gotten real military shining their shoes and getting hair cuts and

wearing their insignia and all that and Doug had had it cause he had six or seven months of real, you know, military stuff and he was saying "ship me out, I don't care, send me to Ban Me Thuot." And I got back to Cam Ranh after seven or eight month, about eight months I supposed it was, and, ah, about two days later you know, Doug and I were having a reunion and two days later they shipped him [laughs] out to Ban Me Thuot.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And he stayed there. And it didn't bother me that much. I was able to handle all their crap pretty much, you know. And, ah, I didn't, I really didn't mind Vietnam that much, I really didn't. I mean I didn't like the part, the seven or eight months I was in Ban Me Thuot getting shot at. But I, you know, I saw a lot of things, you know. I got educated a lot, ah, grew up a lot, you know. Ah, I don't know that I'd do it again though. If I had it to do over I don't know that I'd volunteer for the draft. I think I might of wanted to take my chances. If I knew what I knew, of course I didn't, you know. (Ah huh.) No matter how much I learned and no matter how, you know, much fun I had at Cam Ranh none of it was worth getting shot at, none of it was worth other people you know, shooting things at you and wanting you to die, you know, forget it. It ain't worth it. Ah

JH: What kind of a, what kind of a response did you get when you came home then? Anything spectacular or anything

BF: Well the army was, were real ass holes, you know. We flew non-stop from Lang Bain to Edwards Air Force Base in California. Like ten or eleven hours in the air, non-stop. On this Braniff Airlines and stewardesses you know, treated us like dirt. It was shit. And, ah, well we got back the, the first thing that really pissed me off was that when we got back to Edwards Airforce Base they ran us through customs looking for dope. [JH laughs] And that pissed everybody off. We'd just been, you know, in a war for em for a year and got shot at and now they are looking, they don't trust us you know. Hey, I know guys were bringing stuff back. Ironically of the 200, all of us on the airplane or so, they didn't find even one joint, you know. And that kind of set the tone for my out-processing, you know.

JH: Hmmm.

BF: They were real jerks about it, spit, then they, they bused us from Edwards to Oakland Army Base in Oakland, California and, ah, there was demonstrations going on outside the army base against the war. Ah, we were seeing much of that. Took twenty-four hours there, at Oakland Army Base to out-process us. They gave us a new set of Class A's. One thing a lot of guys were pissed off about in, in Nam, you wore this uniform called Jungle Fatigues and, ah, different kind of material. It was kind of like ribbed stock you know, like nylon tents that had little cross hatch in em.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Kinda like that and, ah, and kinda like, ah, bush jackets. You know, with big patch pockets and stuff and you had em for a year, you know, and they were all a worn and felt comfortable and there was a little bit of pride in those uniforms and they wouldn't let you come home in em.

JH: Really?

BF: They, they made you wear a set of khaki's; back then the army wore khakis. You know, like short sleeve shirt, you know, th, the, a white tee-shirt and khaki pants and they, ah, and the flat hat you know. They, they, they made you, wouldn't let you, couldn't come back in your jungle fatigues.

JH: Did they let you keep em?

BF: Uh uh.

JH: Hmm.

BF: Well you could, you know, some guys did. But you were supposed to turn everything in there at Oakland. Where, of course you had that stuff with you, your, your Nam shit when you left Nam to go back to the States, ah, but you had to turn all that stuff in in your out-processing in Oakland and some guys kept some things, ah, I had keep, I kept, I kept two things from the army. I had a poncho liner, nice poncho, poncho liners were nice. They were, they were nylon, ah, camouflage color, they were real thin and real warm. What you did you snapped them on the inside of your

poncho. (Ah huh.) In, in, in cold rain, kept you warm. But they were nice blankets. I used it for a blanket in Cam Ranh and Ban Me Thuot, real nice. I kept that and I kept my and me, you know, the, the green slacks and, and the, the jacket, you know, and the, the khaki shirt with you know the dark green tie and the hat, you know. They wanted us to look real nice when they let us out. And that's all I had. I had, I had a suitcase. I had my Class A's on and they let me out in Oakland 24 hours after I got to Oakland, I was out of the Army. I was a civilian. I had my Class A's on, that's what you had to wear to leave. And, ah, had one suitcase and inside of that suitcase I had my poncho liner, I had that mountaineer blanket that I was going to give to my mom. I had one civilian pair of pants, sh, one shirt, a belt, ah, no shoes, I, I had to, had those black army shoes on, ah, one change of underwear, that was it. That's all I left the army with. (Ummm) Period, I left the army with less than what I went in with I think. And, ah, me and my buddy Doug, you know, we were reunited cause we went over on the same day, so we came home on the same day.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And he was going back to New York and I was going back to, I was going down to Los Angeles to be with my sister. My mother and my younger sister and my grandmother were visiting my older sister and they lived in Fairmont. It was, you know, the out-processing was basically, you know, get the



hell out of here, you know, we don't want you any more. Ah, you know

JH: Don't ask any questions.

BF: There wasn't, there wasn't, you know, when I left there wasn't any band or parades and when I got back there wasn't any bands and parades there was nobody saying well done, good job, thanks, nobody saying anything like that. It was basically, you know, processing us out. And no place to sleep. I was up for twenty-four hours. They had bleachers, this big auditorium, we sat on these bleachers for twenty-four hours and different things you do you know, you'd go get measured for your class A in sections, you'd go turn your stuff in, sections you know, and you'd go get fitted for your uniform and you'd do all you know just different times. It was just a big processing plant, you know, took twenty-four hours to do it. And I got my mustering out pay. I had about eight or nine hundred dollars in my pocket and my one suitcase with a few things in it and my Class A's. And Doug and I got this taxi, there was a bunch of taxi cabs waiting out there, and Doug and I got this taxi. And, ah, Oakland Air, Oakland International Airport was a lot closer but we wanted to go to San Francisco.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: So we went on to San Francisco. Went to the airport, and Doug and I had a meal, and we went to a bar and got

shit-faced in the bar, cause we were splitting up. And we exchanged addresses and phone numbers. We got \_\_\_\_\_, we wouldn't be in touch, you know, and, ah, Doug's flight for New York left and, ah, he and I, ah, said good-bye, I went back to the bar, had a few more. My flight down to Los Angeles was later on. And I got on the plane and flew to Los Angeles and, ah, got there late at night. My mother was there to pick me up at the airport and we drove out to my sister's in Claremont. I took off that Class A uniform and hung it in my sisters closet and that's where it stayed. (Huh.) When I left I spent a week or ten days down there in California. Went to the beach every day. And my reception from my family was good. My grandmother, bless her soul, she's dead now. My grandmother at that time was 88 years old, 89 years old, and my grandmother in her whole life would never even touched alcohol to her lips an my grandmother was, ah, Cabell County Carrie Nation.

JH: Huh.

BF: Back in the prohibition days.

JH: \_\_\_\_\_[inaudible]

BF: Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah, she used to preach across the street from bars against the evils of being drunk.

JH: What was her name?

BF: Ah, Margaret Mead.

JH: Umm

BF: Ah, but when the next I, we go back, you know, they picked me up and the airport, and it was late, like midnight, one

a.m. With the, the next evening at my brother-in-law and sister's house, they had a bottle of champagne, you know, welcome me, my return, and my dear sainted grandmother took a sip of ch lend of side 2, begin tape 25b, side 11

JH: Okay.

BF: Yes, talking about my grandmother, ah, and my grandfather, ah, Rud T. Neal, Rud Taylor Neal was his name. He died of cancer about 1960, something like that. But, ah, before the depression they were quite wealthy people. He, ah, the house on Kanawha Terrace, it's on the corner of 13th street and Kanawha Terrace, big, huge house, there's a swimming pool in the back, stone wall around it.

JH: Yeah, I know where you mean.

BF: That was, that's where my mother grew up, my grandfather built that house.

JH: Hmm.

BF: For, for the family, ah, my gr, my mother grew up very privileged. She went to a private girls school in Atlanta, Agnes Scott College. [background noise] Ah, they were quite wealthy. Ah, but my problem with my grandfather was that, ah, he wouldn't, ah, when the depression hit you know his money wasn't, his money was paper money, on ledger books and stuff like that. And, ah, he wouldn't demand repayment and things like that, he was too soft hearted and they lost it all. And then after they bought the house on 6th Avenue and 15th Street on the corner of the castle, divided it

immediately into apartments and you know got back on their feet again. But, ah, she was, she was a fascinating woman. Very intelligent, you know. She died in, ah, 74 and so she was like, ah, she was, ah, a widow for like 15 years. And I have very fond memories of her. She was a real neat lady. She wrote a book, ah, on our family history called A Letter to Margie. My middle sister Margie, ah, wrote her a letter one time, ah, asking about family history and that kind of started a correspondence between her and my sister. And, ah, then at one point that got it up and put it all together, and had it bound. My uncle Cam O. Neal, ah, ah, did the cover for it, he's an artist, did the cover for it.

JH: I see him over in the park every once in a while.

BF: Yeah, he's a runner and a tennis player. Ah

JH: So tha, [background noise] th, th, like a family publication.

BF: Yeah, I mean we didn't you know.

JH: That's neat.

BF: Everybody in family has a copy.

JH: That's something every family wants to do.

BF: Yeah.

JH: Very few

BF: Yeah

JH: Very few do it.

BF: Ah, it, it was my grandmother the one that, that took the sip of champagne for me. The only time in her, ah, whole life that she ever had

JH: What'd she say about it? Did she like it?

BF: Ah

JH: [Laughs]

BF: No, uh uh, no. No, it was sin. She had sinned. She probably prayed heavily about it that night.

JH: [Laughs] Yeah, that's amazing.

BF: [background noise] But back to reception my family, you know, I think, I think k, there was some members of my family that, you know, were kinda maybe looking at me a little sideways waiting for me to freak out or something [chuckle] you know, just real, real cautious about me.

JH: Looking for that crazed killer?

BF: Yeah, or something. I, I don't know, you know. I just had a feeling about that. My dad was, I didn't, my dad wasn't out there when I got back. I spent that weekend in Southern California and then we all flew back together. My mother and my grandmother and my sister and I flew back together, an, from California back to, to Cincinnati and then drove from Cincinnati to Huntington. And my dad was there and he was, he was so proud of me, you know, I had been a soldier. My dad had a, a map the size of the doorway there of Vietnam and he had that on the wall and he had little push-pins where I had been. He had a push-pin at Lang Bain and at Bien Hoa at Cam Ranh at Ban Me Thuot and he put other little colored pins where I'd been, you know, (Ah huh.) and stuff like that. Some times I'd take I'd go on a spy run with the

CO and fly around Da Lat and Tuy Hoa. He put little pins and followed, he was the one that I corresponded with mostly when I was over there.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: I corresponded with, ah, with my sister and my little sister and, and also she, a she got one of her girlfriends to write me. And I corresponded with her, that girl and I corresponded with my mom and my dad. But all the vast majority of my letters that I wrote, the person that I wrote the most, it was my dad. And, ah, I had a polaroid. I sent him all the pictures that I took, you know. And I sent him all my money, he opened a bank account for me, saved my money for me. Ah, he was real proud of me. Ah, I got back, ah, the reception that I perceived from my peers was a pretty negative one. Not that people that were my friends before I left were still my friends when I got back and they, I was still their friend. Ah, they, you know, a lot of them were anti-war, anti-war people.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: You know, who were against the war and had been demonstrated against it here-there. But they didn't, they didn't look at me that way because they were my friends before I left, you know, new friends that I made, ah, or that I was wanting to make, ah, that didn't know me before I, I didn't told them that I had been to Nam, you know, once they asked and then I was kind of reluctant because I perceived from them that,

an, that, ah, they looked down on people, you know, especially people that had volunteered like I did.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: You know, that I was, ah, ah, umm, a, you know, warrior in an unjust war, you know. Ah, at that time I had started developing some feelings that it was a crazy thing. Ah, that it was stupid for us to be there since that time, the past 15 years. I've solidified that view. And someone was telling me yesterday the futility of it all. All those people that died, all the people that were maimed and mutilated for life for nothing, you know. It's ridiculous that the students at Kent State, all the GIs that died, ah, you know, the Vietnamese people, North and South, I mean we just slaughtered each other for nothing, nothing. I mean it's, it's totally futile. And I've, I've developed some opinions that, ah, about, about war, very strong opinions. I would believe in it at all, you know. I think it's stupid, ah, I won't fight now, you know. What I mean by that is, ah, you know, I got my discharge, I gave them my six years, I'm 36 years old. I doubt if there was a war in South America like Vietnam they'd want me, but if they did I wouldn't go.

JH: Would you have advised 18, 19 year old [noise in background] kids one way or another or just say \_\_\_\_\_ taking advantage of [more noise]

BF: I don't know that I, I don't, I think it's their, their decision. I'd let them know. I'd, I'd encourage them to think about it. It's their decision, you know, it's like that guy on the film the other evening, you know. That Coker, you know, he'd go, he'd go in a New York minute, but he had some different experiences than I did.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Buy my son, you know, he's, he's 2 1/2 now, let's say another 15 years from now, we're into something like that, I would counsel him. I don't know whether I'd tell him don't go, I don't know that I'd tell him don't go. But I sure would do as much as I could to make sure that he was making that, ah, a thought over decision. Ah

JH: Keep his eyes open.

BF: Yeah, and not just be like I was, which was a blind cow, you know, to the slaughter. Ah, and you know, I want to be ti, you know, I'm a, I'm basically a pacifist now, you know, because of the experience. I, I have a very, very, I have problem with trust in general. And I have a big, I've, they're, I've a, politicians, oh forget it, there's a no, you know, they're a bunch, a they're a bunch of dopes, bunch of idiots, a bunch of sin, oh there's no difference in my mind, ah, you know, between a republican and a democrat, they're all politicians. Self serving, ah, serving big business and other interests, the people that make biggest campaign contributions, people who get the most favors,



lobbyists, you know, ah, our political system sucks. The way it's run, maybe the system doesn't, you know, in theory, but the way our system is run I mean it, you know, I, it reminds of that section in the film Network. Have you seen that?

JH: I never, never did see that.

BF: There's a film called Network written by Patty Chieviski and there's a scene in it, ah, there's this TV anchorman that decides to be a prophet against, ah, ah, various things and he's preaching against, ah, United States government and governments and stuff like that. But anyway, there's this big chair of this big conglomerate that doesn't like what he's doing, owns the TV station, in fact he's doing on him, gets in, in this big room and he says there are no more governments, there is no United States, no USSR and no Japan. We are all one big coporate conglomerate.

JH: Huh.

BF: Okay. There is no, you know, it's big business. And I believe that, truly, I really do. I've seen too much of it. You know. We're not run by Washington, we're run by Exxon. We're run by Consolidated Coal, you know. We're run by the big, huge multi-national corporations, I mean that's the interest, that's who government serves. Government serves commerce. Commerce doesn't serve government today and that's global, not [siren in background] just here in the United States, it's global, you know. And I think that anybody

that, that doesn't see that is just awfully uninformed or awfully naive.

JH: Or doesn't want to see it.

BF: Yeah.

JH: Or refuses to.

BF: I mean, and so you, you know, and all the hoopla and the, you know, and you see these bombastic politicians. "And I will do this for you, I will do that for you" bullshit. They're going to do it for big business. And I don't trust them as far as I can throw 'em, you know. And I don't vote, you know. I don't vo, I vote local stuff.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: You know, I'll vote for who's gonna be my sheriff and who's gonna be my, ah, tax assessor or who's gonna be the things like that, but national politics, forget it. You know, forget it.

JH: Votes are pretty ambiguous.

BF: Yeah.

JH: Do you have to deal with the politicians in your work at all?

BF: Oh sure.

JH: See them for funding or

BF: Oh no, no it's political. We're here at Braley and Thompson. We're funded by the Department of Human Services and it's all politics. The Director of Human Services is appointed by the governor who is elected. [laughs]

JH: Ah huh.

BF: You know, and, yeah, you gotta, you gotta kiss some ass you know. You gotta say the right things to the right people and make sure you don't say the wrong things to the right people and you don't want to alienate people, you want to treat people nice and that's okay. I'm not, I'm not as high up in the structure where I've got to do that.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: You know, I deal with, I deal with my clientel, and I do have to deal with some of the political stuff every now and then, but I leave that up to my supervisors, that's their jobs. Then someday I'll probably be there because I do want to make more money; I do want to have more responsibilities. I may be there some day. But I'm getting, you know, I'm learning the ropes and the education and I know what I'll have to do and that's okay as long as my clientele are being served. As long as I feel like these foster kids or whatever I'm doing, as long as I feel like that, that, that as a counselor, an, in social services as long as I feel like it's benefiting my clientele, yes I will prostitute myself, you know. Yes I will do that, you know. But if I see where it gets in the way, then hell, I'll open a bar.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: I'll open a pizza joint, you know, as long as I can feed my family, you know, have a decent place to live, you know. I love my work. I love being in social service. I love

counseling. I really do. I enjoy doing it, ah, [sighs] but, ah, you know, it, it, I'm, I'm will, I'm willing to compromise my beliefs if I see that it can serve the people that I serve, the clients that I serve. I'll do that. But if I see that that's futile and it doesn't work and that in fact my clients suffer, ah, I may get out of it, you know. I don't know. Then again I may get real, ah, it may serve to encourage me to work even harder. I don't know.

JH: Jeff Payne said something when we were all in his office that day. [background noise] Seemed to him that a lot of Vietnam veterans sort of gravitate towards social service

BF: Ah huh.

JH: work, you know, do you see that too?

BF: Yeah, yeah I do. I do, ah

JH: Any theories?

BF: I don't know. I, I can't really say. I, I guess I have a theory about it is that is that, ah, we've seen a lot of injustice and we've seen a lot of suffering, you know. And we've seen a lot of people chewed up and spit out by the system. And we want to try and do what we can to, to help those people re-group after they've been chewed up or to mobilize them and encourage them to be, ah, not take it, [laughs] you know. Ah, plus it maybe there's a cathartic kind of effect there, you know.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: That we can ourselves, ah, do better, you know, if we can, if we can encourage people through counseling or social work whatever, be better functioning people then therefore they'll be better thinking people, ah, therefore they won't let big government roll over them, something like that.

JH: Yeah.

BF: Me personally, ah, I was interested in this before I went in the army.

JH: Right.

BF: You know.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Ah, out of high school, you know, I, some kind of social service thing interest me at Marshall. I got out in, in 69 and, ah, partied for six months, spent all my savings then went back to the pizza parlor. And then in, ah, 1970, a year after I went out, I went back to college and I studied sociology and anthropology and English and with an idea. What I, what I'd originally planned to do was be a, be a community developer, ah, community development, ah, comm, community development, community organization.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Ah, basically community organization mobilizing people to make changes within their community, you know. Ah, Saul Alinsky was just

JH: The next words out of my mouth.

BF: Yeah, Saul Alinsky was somebody that, ah, who leaped in, he did some good work.

JH: Ah hun.

BF: He was good. And, ah,

JH: Real hard headed.

BF: That's who I was following, you know. Ah, went to school for about five years, umm, at Marshall. From 70 to 75, from fall 70 to Spring 75. Used up my GI bill. Was 10 or 12 hours short of graduation, an, language credit. So I just had this block about completing language credit an, and I ran out of GI bill in the spring of 75 and needed a job and got a job at Owens-Illinois, ah, working in the maintenance department. Loved that. Ah, ah, with still 10 or 12 credits short and didn't know what I'd be working with social sevice. And, ah, got put on assembly line at Owens and that was good because it got me out of there. (Huh.) I would a went nuts and, ah, I just did enough things where they'd fire me, and they fired me, and I went to Charleston still short of my degree and took a civil, social service, civil service exam. And, ah, got a job at Huntington State Hospital without my degree. And while I was at Huntington State Hospital those three years from summer '76 to summer 79, ah, got my undergraduate degree and, ah, then summer 79 went away to Morgantown to get a masters in social work and because

JH: You were married by this time?

BF: Yeah. I was married twice. [Laughs] The first woman I married, ah, [background noise] I married, ah, after I worked at the pizza parlor, when I got back, in the winter and spring of '70, ah, a buddy of mine who worked at a hospital said that there's a job as an orderly open at Huntington Hospital, that paid better. And I knew I was going to go back to school the fall of '70 at Marshall and, ah, so I got this job that I, there in the summer of '70 at this hospital, as an orderly, and in the fall of '70 went back to college and met this nurse and she and I dated for a year and then in December of '71 she and I married. That was a big mistake, ah, and Vietnam had nothing to do with our marriage breaking up.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: She and I just weren't meant for each other. She was a bitch and I was a bastard. I guess. And, ah, that marriage lasted two years and it was basically two years of, of pain, you know. We just argued all the time and that was terrible. Ah, we divorced in the summer of '73. And at that time she was working at the same hospital, and so I quit the hospital. I didn't want to work at the same place she was working at after we divorced. That was in the summer of '73. And I was single from the summer of '73, ah, in, ah, the day of the, my last day at Owens-Illinois, my last day at Owens was April 30, 1976 and on May 1st I had my first date with my current wife. And, ah, that's when I

took the civil service exam and got the position in July of, of 76 at Huntington Hos, Huntington State Hospital as a social worker and a program coordinator, and working with, ah, the crazy people up on the hill. I worked in geriatrics. I worked with mentally retarded people, I worked with people that were higher schizophrenics, that were well medically, under control from medication and, and ready to leave the hospital. Helping them get ready to leave.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And, ah, my wife and I dated through 70, rest of 76 and 77 and on Valentines Day 1977 I asked her to marry me. And she said yes and we got married, ah, nine months later in, ah, November. Well, next Friday it will be my anni, this Friday will be my anniversary. We got married on November 23, 1977. I was still at the State Hospital at that time. Worked there until, ah, till, ah, August of 79 at which time I went away to Morgantown. And my wife and I had been had marital separation not long before I, ah, we got, we were seperated for five or six months, ah, and about a month before I went away to Morgantown we were reconciled and got back together and then a month later, I go away to Morgantown and she's working down here in Huntington and I'm going to school in Morgantown and we saw each other on weekends. Ah, every other weekend she would come up there. She had our car. And then the other, the alternate weekends I would thumb a ride down here. But our marriage wasn't in



too good a shape for that, ah, ah, ah, a six month period of time. Right before, shortly before I went away and our marriage was, it wasn't working out, us being apart.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And, ah, my wife, I think it was in October, early October, I had been there, you know, month and a half or less in Morgantown. It just wasn't working out. My wife said, "Look Bill, I think I want a divorce." And I didn't want a divorce. And so, ah, she did this on the phone and so, ah, I split immediately. Caught a greyhound down to Huntington and she and I spent about a week together just talking. And we decided that, ah, if we were going to stay together we needed to be together. And, ah, because of money and the problems with logistics and stuff. It was either I had to quit college and come back down here and get a job or she had to quit her job and come to Morgantown and find a job. And we looked at this way: she had a job and I didn't. And probably would, you know, be real financially tough if, ah, the only one between us that had a job quit her job because we didn't know if she could find something in her field (Ah huh.) up at Morgantown. So I quit school and came down here. And, ah, my wife continued working and I starting trying to find a job. By this time I had my undergraduate, ah, and, ah, tended bar part-time for some buddies that opened a bar down here called Bojangles. Ah, basically I was just relief for him. I wasn't a regular employee, but

it got in a few extra bucks here and there. They didn't need it. I wasn't really that proficient a bartender. I can bartend. I can make regular drinks. But when people come up asking for these exotic drinks that somebody invented at a local bar, you know. [JH laughs] What are you talking about? You know. I can pour beer and I can mix a gin tonic and you know, but when they come up and want, ah, Polynesian passion.

JH: [laughs] Hello and I want a iced tea.

BF: Give me, yeah. Give me a break, Jack. You know. [noise in background] You want a, a whiskey or not. And, ah, but I did that for them through October and November and I, and in late November of 79 I got a job down at the Mental Health Center in Ashland, Kentucky. That time it was known as Landstown Mental Health Center. A couple of years later they merged with another mental health center know as The Pathways and

JH: Ah huh \_\_\_\_

BF: and there I worked with, ah, alcoholics and drug addicts. I was, ah, substance abuse counseling and made it up through the ladder there. Ah, after I was there about, ah, a year and a half, short of two years, ah, I was promoted to, to, ah, ah, supervisor of the out-patient section of substance abuse at Pathways, there. Ah, Mike lost his job, he got, ah, promoted to county coordinator and I got his job, ah, a position that he had when he interviewed me. And, ah, got more responsibility and supervised people and, ah, went back

to college in January of 1981 for my, ah, graduate degree in counseling at Marshall and went night school and, and one summer term and took three years and in December of 83 I got my graduate degree in counseling. And, ah, I got a verbal commitment a couple years earlier after I, I been in school for about a year and I got this verbal commitment because I, I needed more money and I was thinking about moveing to the mental health center here, cause they had offered me a job with some more money. And, ah, I talked to my supervisor about it and talked to my supervisor's supervisor, and she said that well when you grad, graduate degree she did give me a small raise that wasn't quite what Presteria was offering me but it was enough to keep me, because I like it there.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And she said at that time, I didn't get it in writing, I should have probably, but it wouldn't make any difference, she said there would be significantly more money for me when you get your graduate degree. I got my graduate degree and at that time I was making about \$14,800 a year and they gave me \$600 bucks to 15 pool, which is the minimum for that pay scale master's level supervisor. Been with the place four years, ah, a little over, well, yeah, a little over 4 years. Ah, you know, a lot invested there. I was a good employee. I got real good evaluations. They like my work. Gave me more and more responsibility and then they come through with \$50 a month raise. And, ah, I, I went to the top. I told

them, this is not adequate. You know, you have not, you have not dealt in good faith and, ah, so they said, sorry that's it. And so that was in late January, so early February I started hunting. And, ah, looked at some places and got a couple of feelers. And in late May, I, ah, narrowed it down. I, ah, there was hospital up in South Charleston, Thomas Memorial, that has a substance abuse inpatient unit. And, ah, they were offering me a position and at Branden Thompson here. Basically I was in the catbird seat because I had a job and I had these other two people bidding for my services.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: So I played em off on each other. [laughs] You know, Branden Thompson was the highest bidder, so I left. I really didn't want to leave. I liked my work down there and I loved working with people with drug problems and alcoholism. But, ah, my wife had retired. I had a new baby. I'm making two children. Ah, I had monetary commitments and, ah, wanted to make some more money. And, ah, also wanted some more responsibility and I got both. So since, ah, July, early July of this year I've been working here for Branden Thompson. Ah, working with foster kids. I like it. I like it, ah, real good work. And I'll stay here, you know. I'll stay. Maybe not with foster care, but (Ah huh.) I'll be social service for my career, ah, ca, career.

JH: Ah, let me digress just a minute, ah, you mentioned something about your grandmother's house, the castle.

BF: Ah huh.

JH: Just a little social slice of Huntington history.

BF: Ah huh.

JH: If you recap you know, that was and what it was like.

BF: Well

JH: That's ah, that's an aspect of particularly that time period and, and that type of person that a lot of people in Huntington, I think, aren't really familiar with.

BF: Well, my, ah, grandparents. My mother's parents, ah, Margaret Potts Neal and Rud Taylor Neal, they're old Huntingdon people. Ah, my grandfather Rut T. Neal was born and raised in Monroe County, West Virginia. Ah, my grandmother was, was born and raised here in Cabell County and they met and married, ah, around the turn of the century. Around 1900 or something like that. Ah, my grandfather and grandmother were both born in 1880. And they were both 20, 21, 22 when they got married, 1902, something like that. And my grandfather was, ah, a realtor in real estate in a development of Huntington, opened up a whole lot of Huntington, but anyway they, he did real well, they were, they were, for those times, wealthy. I don't know if they were millionaires, but you know, he didn't need to have a million dollars back in the turn of the century to be rich.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: You know, a couple of hundred thousand did it. [Laughs]  
And, an, built a house on Kanawha Terrace and my mother and  
her, an, brother, my Uncle Cam O. Neal, grew up. So they,  
they were fairly privileged. The depression hit and wiped  
'em out and at that time they had to get rid of the house on  
Kanawha Terrace. So they lived in another house some place  
around where Huntington Publishing Company is today; there  
used to be a fire station over there. And, ah, then, on,  
sometime around the mid-30s, about 1935 or so they bought,  
you know, it's 1505 6th Avenue. And, it's a big house on  
the corner of 6th Avenue and 15th Street in Huntington.  
It's called, it was call the "castle". Ah, and they divided  
it up into apartment and rented it out and my grandfather  
started making, you know, re-cooping his office. Ah, my  
grandfather died in 1959 and my grandmother continued to  
live there. I have some very fond memories of, ah, growing  
up, ah, playing with my cousin, my, my Uncle Cameron's  
daughter, Ann Neal. Ah, ah, playing in the castle and going  
up to the turret on top. And the people that lived on the  
3rd floor apartment we knew, we'd go up to the turret. Ah,  
I lived there myself a couple of times. Ah, after I was out  
of, out of the army and out of 'Nam. I lived there when I  
was going to Marshall. Ah, my grandmother was active in, in  
First Presbyterian Church. Ah, very intelligent person.  
She was an artist. Very beautiful watercolors, mostly

flowers and things. Ah, God I know that she was, ah, a fantastic person and so was my grandfather, ah, Rud T. Neal and a lot of, of, a lot of what I am, I'm sure has a lot to do with my grandfather. I was eleven when my grandfather died. I remember him but he was a very stoic, you know, didn't have much truck with kids. (Ah huh.) You know, not that he didn't like 'em but, you know, they were, that was left to the womenfolk.

JH: Keep a distance with 'em.

BF: Yeah. But I did spend some time with him, but I spent a lot of time with my grandmother after my grandfather died. And, ah, she was, she was a fantastic woman, ah, I remember, you know, you were doing this oral history project with Vietnam vets, back when I was at Marshall in the early 70s in undergraduate school, it was somebody that was doing oral history talking with older people, you know. About their experiences about Huntington and stuff and things like that. I remember mentioning to somebody in the history department back then, well I'll interview my grandmother; she knows a lot. You know, she's been in Huntington. My grandmother used to tell me Civil War stories once, once removed.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: Her father, she was born in 1880, her father was a lieutenant, ah, and, ah, [end of side 1, begin side 2] ... ah, my grandmother's father told her stories about, ah, his time in the Civil War, and she told me. There are some stories in the book I mentioned earlier, A Letter to Margie,

about some of the things in the Civil War, that to this day I cry when I read it.

JH: Hmmm.

BF: Ah, ah, I don, I don't want to recap them right now because I'd probably cry if I did. I mean just some heart rendering stories that one of them one of my uncles, you know, great uncles was in a northern, ah, prison camp during the Civil War, and the family didn't know whether he was alive or dead. And they thought he was dead because they didn't hear from him. And, ah, he was, ah, the war was over, he got released, he had to walk home several hundred miles from wherever the camp was. They lived in Monroe County, ah, and, ah, he was several miles from home on the side of the road, you know, you know, almost died. And his brother, ah, was, was traveling on that road on horse. They hadn't seen each other in like five years and, ah, he, he was lost for dead. And they saw each other and, ah, whenever my grandmother would tell me that story (Hmmm.) and it was that she would, she would relate it as the prodical son, you know. Once my, I thought my son was lost, but he is found. (Well) And it's just that she would tell me some stories like that and I remember sitting at her knee and she'd tell me the stories that were so fascinating, ah, interesting family history. I know a whole lot about that side; I know very little about my father's side.

JH: Did anybody from Marshall ever come over?



BF: Well, never did interview her, you know, she died. Ah, my father died in the winter of 73 and my grandmother died about a year later and, you know, she was 93 years old. Well, she was, she was, yeah, her birthday was in, ah, Eastertime and she died, ah, you know, in, ah, the winter of, of 74, just before her 94th birthday, I think. I thought that was a loss.

JH: That's too bad.

BF: They missed out, you know. Ah

JH: What was, ah, what was life in the castle like when you were living there?

BF: While I was living there, it was fantastic. It was, ah, it was, ah, a hippy community. We had a commune there basically. Ah, not an officially formed, I mean we all didn't move in there together because we all wanted to live together, but the castle had, ah, one, two, three, four, five, there was seven apartments in it. There was three on the first floor, three on the second floor and the third floor was one huge, big apartment. And when I was living there in the early 70s my grandmother lived on one apartment on the first floor, all but one half of it. And on the other side of the first floor a Mr. Thompson who was a math teacher at Marshall lived there in the front half, and then the back that was a single room that, ah, this guy, ah, John Brennan, Bremmer, something like that, lived back there in little, walk bed and stuff like that. On the second floor

there was a, a one room apartment with a huge bathroom and dressing room off of it. That I lived in. Up front there was a guy named, ah, Willy Pavere and, ah, his girl, ah, Becca Walton, you might of know Becca, I don't know if she's, ah,

JH: I don't know [noise] \_\_\_\_\_ [inaudible]

BF: Ah, and he was a musician, and, ah, then across the hall was, ah, Kevin Karch and Roxanne Bartholomey and, ah, he, Kevin was a musician and Roxanne was the most gorgeous woman I've ever seen in my whole life, ah, just, ah, absolutely beautiful. [noise] And then, ah, on the third floor was Matthew Beard and his lady Gloria. And we were all Marshall, the second and third floor. Of course, Mr. Thompson was a teacher and, ah, John, ah, behind Mr. Thompson was a Marshall student with long hair and rode a bicycle. I was a Marshall student, long hair and rode a bicycle and couple of, ah, hippy musicians and, ah, an Willy and Kevin and their ladies. And, ah, Roxanne and Kevin had a daughter, ah, Candice Bartholomey, and, ah, third floor was Matthew and Gloria and they were Marshall students and counter-culture people and we lived there. It was fantastic. The doors were always opened to everybodys, you know. And we would all talk and sometimes, you know, we'd, a bunch of us would go down and sit around and sit with my grandmother and she'd tell us old stories and stuff like that. My grand, I mean she was my grandmother, but everybody in the building just loved her and spent time with

her. I called her grandmother and everybody else called her Mrs. Neal and she welcomed people in sometimes we'd have friends over and stop by and have coffee with her and talk with her and, ah, we'd share meals together and it was a wonderful time. It was an absolutely a wonderful time. It was real good for me, because it kind of got me back into, into being with people and, and, ah, away from my bitterness about my military experience and stuff like that. Ah, it was great. I, I'll never forget those times. It was really wonderful.

JH: I can remember driving by that place and wondering what it, what it is, was like in there. You know?

BF: Ah, they've totally destroyed it now.

JH: Yeah.

BF: When my grandmother died (Yeah.) my mother and uncle sold it. They gutted the inside. The place was to have the first floor and fifteen foot ceilings. And the second floor and like twelve foot ceiling and the third floor was like eight or nine foot ceilings. And, ah, woodwork, huge, big oak, twelve inch base boards and boards around the ceiling, huge, big oak sliding doors. Beautiful. I mean just gorgeous. I mean the center hallway had a stairwell with this huge, big oak bannister going up. They gutted all of that and put in these small little efficiency apartment all over it. Ah, that's one thing that I wish I went through because in the summer of '74 when they sold it, they sold that place for something like 40,000 dollars.

JH: Oh. [noise]

BF: And I wish I'd a bought it. I wish I'd bought it, you know. And I'd kept it as it was, you know. But I didn't. Ah, it's too late now. Cost you a \$100,000 to restore it.

JH: Ah huh. (You know.) Now at least.

BF: Yeah.

JH: You mentioned. Just one more question and then I'm gonna [noise] dismantle. Ah, on our last interview, unfortunately which had technical difficulties, ah, you mentioned that it's only what just in the last couple of years that you started talking, you know, about your experiences in the service about like you wanted to.

BF: Yeah.

JH: Have people been responsive to that? Is, is

BF: Well, I don't seek people out to talk about it, you know. What happen was that when I got back in 69, an, as I said before my friends that were my friends before they would ask me, you know, what was it like, and I would say, well, it was something and cut it off. And they understood that and they didn't press me to talk about it. That was okay. Ah, the other people, the new people I was making friends with, ah, most of them knew that I'd been to 'Nam but they didn't want to hear about it. And once they got to know me they didn't realize that I was a baby killer, and a war monger, and a warrior and all that. And it was okay. And I did, I didn't talk about 'Nam on purpose, because I wanted to fit

in. You know. I wanted to be part of people, you know. With my peer group. And my peers were people that were against the war. You know. And by that time I was against the war too. And I wasn't against the war, because they were against it. I, I, I was against it because of my experience there.

JH: Ah huh.

BF: And how crazy and futile the whole damn thing was. And, ah, so I just purposely didn't talk about it you know. Because I didn't, I wanted to fit in. Suffer the memories. You know, I, I didn't have a lot of the painful memories and the flashbacks that a lot of grunts that were out in the field. (Ah huh.) I don't have that because I didn't experience that. Ah, but I have some very, very strong opinions and, and, h, about war and about Vietnam and craziness of it all. And that, and that we were lied to so much, ah, but I didn't talk about it. Ah, it was only, ga, it's been fifteen years since I've been back. (Ah huh.) Over fifteen years. And it was no, it was seven, eight years before I talked about it. And I've only talked about it in the past seven or eight years or so. And that's only with people like you or people that want to know. Who want to talk to me about it, you know, and, and I've not had experience with people that, that want to comment or get on my case for being there. You know, who want to argue with me about it, you know, cause if they talk to me they'd find that probably I'm, I'm of the same opinion they were, but I haven't had that.

JH: And hopefully people have grown out of that feeling, (Ah huh.) that attitude.

BF: They have, I think that's over with, you know. But I'm not reluctant to talk about it now. As I told you earlier, I think if, if this would have been six or seven years ago I probably would have said, "No thanks, I don't want to do this."

JH: Ah huh.

BF: But, or eight years ago. But in the past five, six, seven years, yeah, I talked about it. People want to talk to me about it, I'll talk about it. You know a lot of times I'll talk about in hopes that I'll get people thinking that if anything, thing ever like this comes up again, they'll, like I was telling you before about alking with my son or Kenley to think about it for a minute you know. People threatening our shores here? Are people really threatening our interests? I mean the reason why we're having all this involvement in all these South American countries in my opinion is because there's a couple of multi-nationals that have a whole lot of that, that, that some big business people in America have, ah, interests there, you know, with sugar fields and bananas and it's comerce you know. If Nicaragua didn't have anything that we wanted as far as commerce, I doubt that we'd be so crazy about, ah, you know, helping the Contras fight the Sandinistas. You know. I doubt it, you know. We'd, we'd pitch a big bitch about the

communists and everything like that, but I doubt it we'd, but there has to be, you know, there has to be some financial interest down there. Ah, Dole Pineapple must own something down there, you know. Or somebody you know, has some interest that back when they had the, the right-wing regimes in there, you know, they were, they had, ah, you know, it was favorable to big business in this country, you know, we could get cheap labor and cheap land and we could buy their produce cheap and sell it for a huge profit back here or around the world. Oh that's what's going on down there and, and if people, if we have, you know, hopefully if I talk to people that want, I won't volunteer information about 'Nam to people. It's basically in my past and, and I, I, I campaigned or, or protestized against the war. Ah, for awhile after I got back not telling about my experiences, but just basically against it and I'm done with that and I'm getting on with my life and my family and my career; but if people want to talk to me about it, I will. And what I want people to do is to really think about it and what's behind all this. Are we trying to save the world from communism or we trying to save the world for capitalism? Are we trying to save the world for big business? You know. Think about, you know. Is it worth having fifty or a hundred thousand Americans slaughtered so General Foods can make more money?

JH: Just to finish this up, ah, were you born in 1948? (Ah huh.) Is that what you told me? Okay. \_\_\_\_\_

BF: June 28.

JH: And your, you have a two and a half year old son?

BF: Son named Elliot and a nine month old daughter.

JH: And a daughter.

BF: Named Kara.

JH: Yean. Alright.

END OF INTERVIEW